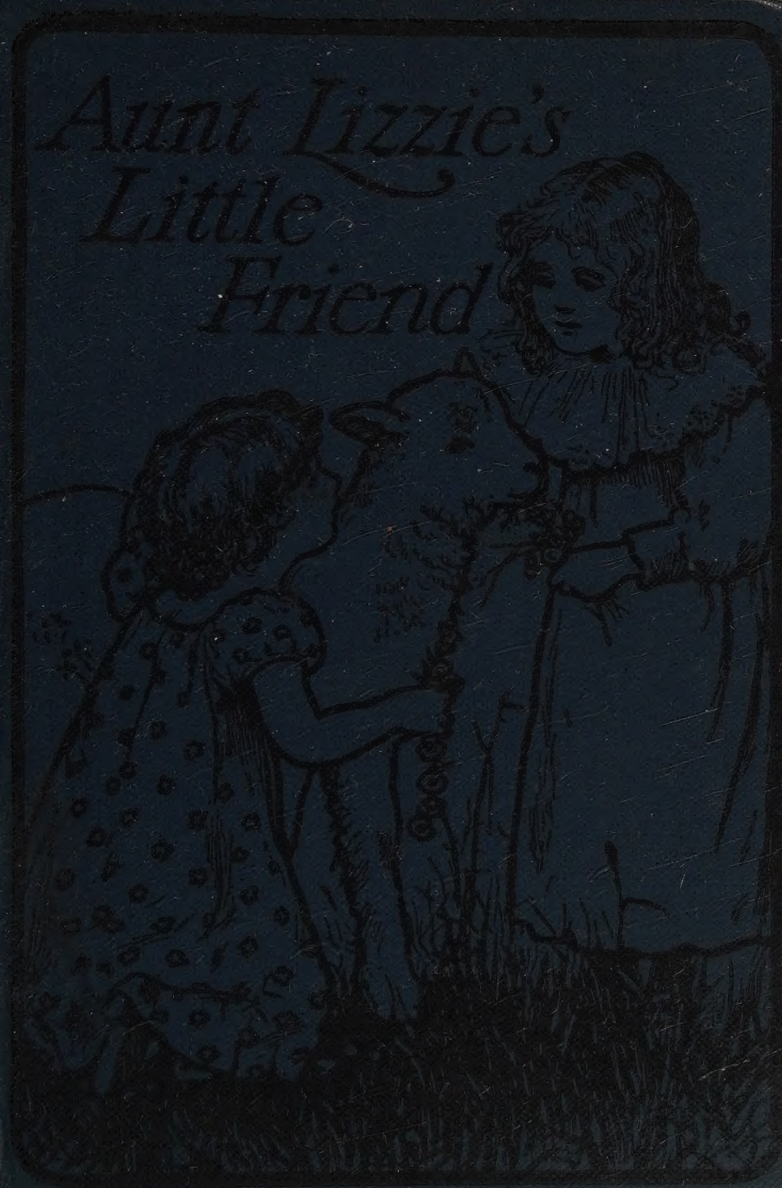
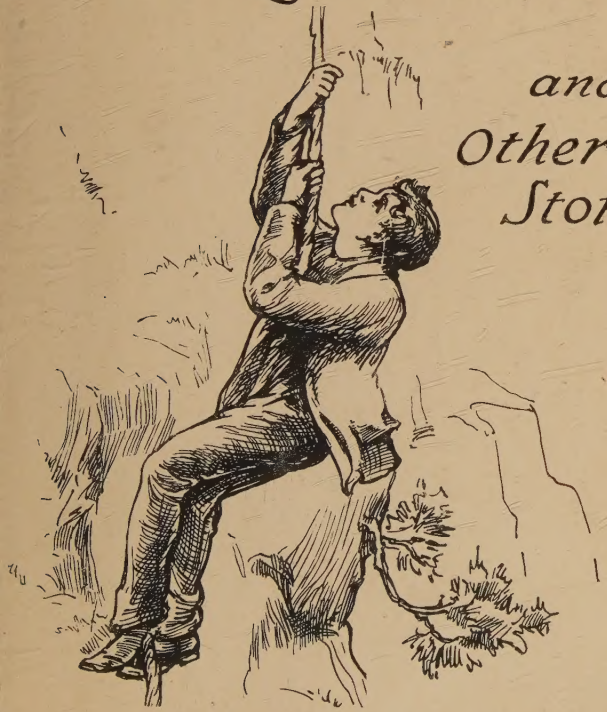
Aunt Lizzie's Little Friend



AUNT LIZZIE'S LITTLE FRIEND.

"Billy and I sat crouching together on the face of that cliff, his arm about me."

Aunt Lizzie's Little Friend and Other Stories



"Dangling between sky and sea."

Page 60.

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AUNT LIZZIE'S LITTLE FRIEND

BY

C. E. LOW

And Other Stories

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CONTENTS.

AUNT LIZZIE'S LITTLE FRIEND, ...	7
A YULE HOME-COMING, ...	45
WILLIE, THE LOST CHILD, ...	62
MATTY'S CANARY, ...	70

AUNT LIZZIE'S LITTLE FRIEND.

"I DECLARE this is always the way things turn out! Is it not too provoking, Aunt Lizzie? Here it has been freezing hard all the week until to-day, when a fellow has a holiday, and then of course it must come a thaw. Oh, hang it!" and crash went the young grumbler's skates into a farther corner of the room, not to the improvement either of themselves or the article of furniture they came against.

Aunt Lizzie was a sweet, delicate-looking lady, and an invalid. Owing to

an accident which had befallen her in her childhood, she had not walked at all since she was four years old, but sat constantly in a wheel-chair. She started nervously at the noise the skates made, and ventured a gentle remonstrance. "Hush, hush, Arthur! and, like a good boy, don't throw things about like that."

"I am sorry I gave you a fright with the noise I made," said Arthur penitently; and picking up the skates, he examined them carefully to see they had sustained no injury from his violence.

"You had better look at the desk they came against, too," said Aunt Lizzie, smiling.

Arthur glanced round the somewhat dingy old schoolroom contemptuously, and said,—

"As to that, it would not much matter though every battered old stick in the place were smashed, for all

they're worth. I'm sure I wonder, auntie, why you should so often sit here in preference to any other room in the house."

His aunt looked round her with as much affection as he had contempt.

"I have so many pleasant memories connected with this dear old room," she said, "and every 'battered old stick' it contains, that I sit here and live over again passages in my past life that the absence of any article would spoil."

"If they are pleasant memories, I wish you would tell some of them to Bertha and me, auntie. Perhaps it might make us like the old place better; for she despises it as much as I do, and wishes it were as smart and new as the Godfreys' schoolroom at the Mead. — Eh! don't you, Bertha?" addressing a little girl of thirteen, a year younger than himself, who was drawing at the large centre table.

"I should think I do," she replied, stopping her work for a moment, while she added with her pencil another inscription to the many which already adorned the painted deal table.

"If any of my recollections would make you think better of it, I should be very glad to give you some of them," said Aunt Lizzie, the tears almost standing in her gentle eyes at the notion of seeing the old place dismantled of its rickety contents and refilled with brand new furniture.

"Well, my proposal is this," said Arthur. "The thaw has deprived us all three of our day's amusement—for you know, Aunt Lizzie, you were going on the ice too; you promised to let me take you in your bath-chair—so the best plan would be for Bertha and me to do as much of our next week's work as we can to-day, in case it should freeze then; and

perhaps you will tell us one of your stories, auntie, to amuse us while we work."

"I have no objection, my dear, if it will help to reconcile you to your disappointment."

"All right!" said Arthur, putting away his skates with a rueful look, and producing an atlas and the materials with which to draw a map instead.

You know (said Aunt Lizzie) that this was our schoolroom when your aunt Effie, Uncle Dick, and myself were children; this house being then your grandpapa's, as it is now your father's. Well, the weather and everything about me to-day brings most vividly to my recollection a day many years ago when I was a girl of fourteen, Effie, fifteen, and your uncle Dick a boy of sixteen. Your papa, who was much older, was at college.

We were looking out at this very

window, and there had come a thaw after a frost as it has done to-day. Like you, Arthur, Dick was grumbling at the change in the weather, and I was condoling with him.

"Wouldn't it be nice, Dick," I remarked at last, wishing to change the conversation, "if we lived in the days of the fairies, and could have three wishes for the asking?"

"Uncommonly jolly!" exclaimed Dick. "Just suppose we do now, for the fun of the thing. What would you wish for, Lizzie?"

"Of course I should wish to walk," I replied.

"Ah, to be sure, poor Lizzie," said kind-hearted Dick. "But what if a fairy could not give you that?"

"Then I must think again," said I.

"While Lizzie is thinking, tell us what you would choose, Effie."

"A pony, for one thing," she answered at once.

"My wish is to be a soldier," said Dick enthusiastically, and he began shouting, "Let me like a soldier fall." Then, coming back to earth again, "And now, Lizzie, what have you wished for?"

"Effie has given me an idea," I replied. "I should like a pony-carriage, and Effie's pony would perhaps draw it sometimes."

Effie had begun to suggest that as long as I was about it I might as well wish for a pony to myself, as it would do hers no good to be used both for riding and driving, when our father entered. He was smiling.

"I overheard the latter part of your conversation, my children, from the next room," he said; "and I have come to tell you that I am ready to act the part of the good fairy, on one condition."

"Name it, name it, papa!" cried Dick.

"Well, I will grant his or her wish to the one who gives me great pleasure first."

We all looked very much bewildered by this reply.

"What do you mean, papa?"

"Perhaps you will understand better what I am aiming at," he replied, "when I point out to you that you have each one fault more strongly developed than any other, and which may be almost said to be characteristic of you. Now, the easiest way for you to obtain your wishes would be to overcome that fault. I need scarcely tell you what it is in each of you, for I have no doubt you know; especially as this is not the first time I have mentioned the subject," and then our father, after a meaning look all round, left the room as suddenly as he had entered it.

We all three sat quiet for a few minutes, till Dick, ever the first to break a silence, exclaimed,—

"Well, girls, I've got it! Papa calls me a young spendthrift, and says my money always burns a hole in my pocket. Did you observe how hard he looked at me just now, as much as to say, 'Have you spent the weekly sixpence?' But, by good luck, I have it yet; and as I intend to have *my* wish as soon as possible, and extravagance is my snare, I will march off at once to the village savings-bank and deposit my coin there."

"Do you mean to say you still have that sixpence you got in the morning?" asked Effie sarcastically.

"Not having had an opportunity of spending it since, I have, ma'am," said Dick, with mock gravity.—"And, Lizzie, if you'll get on your things, I'll take you out with me; for mamma said you must

have a walk, and besides I want you to see my money safely in."

Now I would have been very much pleased to take a walk with Dick to any other quarter but the village. That I hated, on account of the streets being much crowded and a swarm of dirty children generally about, so I demurred to the proposal.

"Cannot mamma keep your money for you as well as the savings-bank?" I asked.

Dick's sunny face clouded over. He saw I did not want to go to the village.

"You know, Lizzie, that if mamma has it, I shall bother her out of it in a day or two, as I have often done before. You might come with me, like a dear old girl! Mamma said you must get out; and if you come to the bank, that will be killing two birds with one stone. I will take tremendous care of you among the little ragamuffins down there."

I was about to refuse, especially as Effie was going to make a call with mamma, and could not come with us, when it flashed across me that inasmuch as Dick's fault was extravagance, mine was an intense selfishness, which led me in general to prefer my own desires to those of others, and to have my own way at whatever cost. Why should I not make an attempt to get the better of this? Dick was beginning at once; why shouldn't I? Without a second thought I consented to go, and in another quarter of an hour we were on our way to the village.

You know the sweet-stuff shop at the corner of the street where the savings-bank stands? Well, that shop always offered a strong temptation to Dick, and this day was no exception to the rule.

"I think I may just spend twopence there, Lizzie," he said, with a longing

gaze. "That toffy looks uncommonly nice, and I'm sure you would like some."

"No, no," I said, laughing. "Make a good beginning, at any rate, and put your whole sixpence in the bank."

"Very well," pushing on my chair with a sigh. "I'm sure it's a blessing you came out with me."

A little farther on was a large group of children, gathered in the middle of the road, making a great noise. I began to tremble at once.

"Now don't be a goose, Lizzie," said my brother. "They're too much taken up with something there to notice you; and besides, you're quite safe with me. I wonder what they've got, though," he added, as we came opposite the small crowd, who were talking and gesticulating loudly.

"You may go and see if you like," said I, my curiosity overcoming my fear.

Dick left my chair, and advancing into the middle of the street, I saw him look over the heads of the children, and then, with a cry of "Oh, you big cowards!" plunge into their midst. Not till after what appeared to me—alone and undefended on the path—a small age of horror, did he reappear, his hat knocked over his eyes, hair dishevelled, and jacket dusty, and dragging by the arm a poor, deformed little lad with pale face, and eyes red with weeping.

"You cowardly little wretches!" exclaimed Dick fiercely, after depositing their victim on the path by my chair, "to set on a poor little beggar who can't defend himself. Shame on you!" and my bold brother clenched his fist and crimsoned with rage.

What the result of this daring behaviour would have been I can't tell. Unfortunate for Dick and his two charges, I

have no doubt, had it not been for the opportune appearance of the parish beadle at the end of the street. At his dreaded appearance the mob of children melted away faster than the frost this morning; while the great man stalked slowly along, seemingly unconscious of the effect his presence had produced, and entered the house opposite where we stood, luckily for us, as it prevented our enemies re-assembling. Dick adjusted his disordered attire, and wiped his hot face, saying kindly to his prize, who still sat on the edge of the path crying quietly, "I hope you are not hurt, my little fellow?"

"No, not much, thank'ee kindly, sir," sobbed the little hunchback; "but they've broken the jug and spilt the milk mother sent me for, and she'll beat me dreadful when I get home," and his tears came faster than before.

"Never mind that," said Dick, pro-

ducing the unretainable sixpence; "here is what will get you a new jug, I daresay."

"And you can get some more milk with that," I put in, giving him another sixpence.

"Oh, thank'ee, sir! thank'ee, miss!" exclaimed our little *protégé* gratefully, pulling his forelock, and wiping his eyes with the sleeve of his ragged coat.

"We will come with you as far as we can," said Dick, "in case you should be attacked again.—Shall we, Lizzie?"

"Oh yes," I replied, with wonderful readiness; but then my feelings were interested and my sympathies aroused, as they always are by seeing one whom God has afflicted tormented by his fellow-creatures. So we accompanied Robin, as he called himself, while he made his purchases.

On the way we learned all his sad

story, for his tongue had been easily unloosed by a little kindness. He was the son of a poor widowed woman, who made her living by keeping a pawnbroker's shop—the eldest of a family of four, and, according to his own account, always getting kicked and cuffed for the faults of his brethren; why, he did not seem to know very well, unless it was because he was twisted and ugly. For the same reason, he had to give up going to the village school, the children persecuted him so. In general he managed to keep out of their way, but to-day they had drowned his kitten, and then fallen upon him because he had tried to save it, and called them murderers. "And so they are!" he exclaimed with a fresh flood of tears, and shaking his fist in the air with an expression that Dick declared afterwards reminded him of a vicious monkey, while neither of us felt

competent to reprove him for his outburst of indignation.

When we parted from him at last, I told him that if he came up to our house the next day, the gardener, who was in want of a lad to assist him with his work, might give him a job to do—a proposal received with great delight by poor Robin.

At home, when we talked over our adventures at the dinner-table, mamma went in very readily with my idea of engaging the little cripple as a permanent assistant to the gardener; but I remember thinking papa very hard-hearted because he declined doing anything for my *protégé*, as he called Robin, unless I did something in the way of assistance myself.

"What in the world can I do more?" cried I, somewhat provoked at his quiet smile.

"I don't think you've done so very much yet, Lizzie," he said; "but if he came to be gardener's boy here, you might do something worth speaking of. For instance, you say he can't go to the village school. Now if—"

I interrupted him. "I know what you're going to say, papa—that I might teach him. Oh dear, that would not be at all nice! Besides, I've got my own lessons to do, and have very little time after they're finished."

"Perhaps Lizzie is not equal to such hard work either," said mamma kindly.

"Well, my dear," said papa, without looking at me, "she knows best what she can do. I would not have proposed this had I not heard her complaining dismally of having nothing with which to amuse herself in the hour between morning and afternoon lessons, which she said was not enough time for a walk; and it struck

me just now that this would be, if not altogether amusement, at least a pleasing occupation for that very hour."

"*I* don't think it would be very pleasant," I exclaimed. "I'm sure I shouldn't like teaching at all!"

"Then, as I don't think it would be doing the poor boy any great service merely to look after his body and let his mind take care of itself, we will just let him come to-morrow, and then have nothing more to do with him, for I would feel it a sort of reproach to see him about."

I know my dear father said this in order to see if I could forego my own selfish ease and pleasure for another's benefit, and I am glad to say I did not disappoint him in the way I took his hint.

"I will teach him, rather than you should do that," I exclaimed; "and I

daresay it will not be so bad after all."

"That is right, Lizzie," said my father, with a look that rewarded me more than his words.

I was so much afraid of my good resolutions dying away that I felt quite impatient to begin Robin's education; and begin I did the very next day, shortly after he made his appearance.

I soon found that I had got a pupil who made my task both amusing and interesting. In the first place, he was very much impressed with the honour I did him, and the amount of knowledge I was possessed of, and at first would spend two or three minutes gazing at me in rather an embarrassing manner; while he wiped his hands (which he always thought were dirty) on his trousers, before he could take the book in his own grasp and begin. He was by no means

stupid, but on the contrary very intelligent; and when he got over his shyness, would sometimes put questions that puzzled me more than I cared to own. And in addition to the novelty and pleasure of the thing, the poor creature poured out upon me all the treasures of an affection hitherto unclaimed. He was very fond of Dick, too, but not so much as of me. Nothing was good enough for Miss Lizzie, who, in his eyes, was as beautiful and almost as perfect as an angel; and into every little service he did for me—the cleaning of my bath-chair, the tending of my garden, or the preparation of his own lessons—he threw as much ardour as such common, everyday tasks would admit. Indeed, I think poor Robin Harvey was as devoted and attached a retainer as ever any one was blessed with.

After the first day, papa provided him with a suit of good clothes, and put him

to board with the gardener in the little lodge at the gate; and to my certain knowledge he never went beyond the garden gate for six months, except to church. By that time you would not have known him to be the same boy as the puny, sickly-looking creature who seemed ready to sink into the ground if one but looked sternly at him. He was now healthy and sunburnt with working in the open air; and though his deformity was as great as ever, you did not notice it so much, he appeared so happy and contented, looking as if he had business in the world, and were doing it.

One day at the end of the six months, a very hot day in the middle of summer, Robin told me that his mother had sent up a message the night before, asking if he had quite forgotten them, and desiring him to come and see her.

"I suppose I should go, Miss Lizzie,"

he said; "it *is* a very long time since I saw them all."

"Yes," I replied, "I think you ought. But what is the matter with you, Robin; you don't seem much delighted to go?"

"No, indeed, Miss Lizzie! And it's no wonder—they all hate me at home. I can't think what mother wants with me now."

"Why, you stupid boy," said I, laughing, "she is longing to see you, of course."

Robin shook his head dubiously. "Ah, you don't know mother, Miss Lizzie."

"Even though I have not that pleasure," said I, "yet I think that is the most likely thing to believe. What else could she want with you?"

"That I don't know," said Robin; "but it's not that—it's something else, I'm sure. But if you think I should go, I will, Miss Lizzie."

"Perhaps she wants your wages," I suggested.

"No, miss; I sent her all I had a week ago. So you see her message is a puzzler—for she doesn't like me, so she can't want to see me; and she's got all my money, so it isn't that."

But I could not answer his doubts, so he went off in a state of bewilderment that amused me greatly.

You know, my dears, that your grandpapa was a solicitor, and old Mr. Godfrey of the Mead, whose grandchildren's schoolroom you admire so much, was one of his clients. Well, this evening of Robin's holiday, my father was sent for by the old gentleman, whose health for some weeks past had been failing, and who was constantly making arrangements for the final disposition of his worldly effects.

This night papa was kept very late, and when he did return he was laden

with an immense amount of money in gold and notes — about ten thousand pounds, I believe. It belonged to Mr. Godfrey; and though he was very fond of having a great deal of his wealth by him, yet he had begun to fear he might be robbed, and had given it to papa to take up to London the next day and put in the bank. It was a great responsibility, and papa declared he felt quite nervous about it, especially as we had no money-safe in the house.

What if our house should be broken into?

The bare idea made me tremble.

"I have at last come to the conclusion," papa said, "that the best plan would be to put it in the secretary in my study, and get some one who is a light sleeper and easily awakened to sleep in the room with it. It is a pity that Dick is not at home, but Robin will do quite as well, as we

merely want some one to alarm the house, not to defend the treasure. Where is Robin?"

But that turned out to be a question more easily asked than answered. No one had seen Robin since eleven in the morning, and the gardener stated that he had then gone to see his mother, and had not come back.

"She must have had an attack of affection and kept him all night, I suppose," said my father, "which is rather a nuisance at this time. However, we must just get some one else to perform the duty of guard. I would do it myself, only I sleep so heavily."

But the discussion ended with papa's having the honourable post himself—every one else declaring with one voice that there were many grave and sufficient reasons why they could not fill it.

So we all went to bed, and in most

cases to sleep, though as for me I spent a most dismal night. Effie generally occupied the same bedroom with me; but she and Dick were away on a visit, so I had the large room next the study all to myself.

I had made up my mind that the house would be robbed, my principal reason for arriving at this conclusion being Robin's absence in connection with his bewilderment of the morning. I am not quite sure how I argued to myself, but my convictions on the subject were so fixed that I determined to sit up all night, intending, should the house be attacked, to go into the next room and awake papa, who would as surely and quietly go to sleep there as in his own bed.

So I persuaded my maid to leave me a little earlier than usual, that no one might suspect what I was going to do and prevent me, and wrapping my white flannel

dressing-gown about me and putting my feet up, I established myself for the time being. You may fancy that I did not feel particularly comfortable, for I was dreadfully nervous; and though I had provided myself with an interesting book, my attention was continually distracted from the tale by the thousand nameless little sounds, the creakings and groanings which seem to fill a house at dead of night, and at each one of which my heart would beat so loud I could almost hear it.

Notwithstanding all this, and the discomforts of my position sitting upright in my chair, I did manage to doze off at last, my miseries following me, however, into the land of dreams, and causing me various unpleasant adventures there. In the last of these I dreamt I was in the schoolroom, trying to read by a broad stream of moonlight, in the midst of which I sat, and which felt very cold. Papa was lying

fast asleep in a corner, snoring so loudly that I fancied I was about to throw my book at him to wake him, when I heard another noise, which, though stealthy, was distinct. It sounded like walking on tip-toe, and the cautious opening of a door.

At the same moment the schoolroom window was thrown open from the outside, and Robin Harvey, followed by his mother, came in by it. I called out "Thieves!" and tried to go to my father, who still slept on, but I could not move, and before I could call a second time Robin put his hand on my mouth, saying, "They must not hurt Miss Lizzie. What an angel she is!" I struggled so violently that I awoke, and for the first moment or two thought I was still dreaming. My candle had gone out and the room was filled with cold moonlight, the door stood open, and strangest of all, there was Robin bending over me, looking not a little confused.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Lizzie," he said, whenever he saw I was wide awake. "I would not have come into your room, but I have been trying to wake up the servants and could not make them hear, and there is no time to lose. I only want to know where the master sleeps. There are thieves in the house!"

"Where, where?" I cried, the last remnants of my drowsiness departing in a second. "Not in the study, I hope, for papa is there?"

"Yes, miss, they're there now, I'm afraid. But if we are quiet and careful, we may catch them all yet."

"Oh, he'll be killed! Papa'll be killed!" I exclaimed, under my breath.

"No fear of that," said Robin. "I knocked up the gardener as I passed the lodge—he'll be here directly; and I'll go to the master now."

"No," said I, with a sudden accession

of courage; "do you go back to the servants and try to rouse them, and I'll go to papa myself."

"You, miss! You can't go; you'll die of fright—" But before he could finish I had left my room and was quietly wheeling to the study. One might be apt to think my chair would be rather noisy, but *you* know I can move it on a carpet as softly as any one could walk.

("It was very plucky of you, auntie," interrupted Arthur.)

I am afraid it was not in reality quite so much so as it looks (she replied), for my courage had been wrought up, as any girl's, however weak, would have been, by the thought of my father's danger. The study door was ajar, and a faint light came from it. I pushed it open wider and entered, unperceived by two men, one of whom stood, the other knelt, before the secretary.

Papa was still sleeping peacefully.

The men had apparently just forced open the secretary, and I stood, or rather sat, absolutely transfixed with horror for a moment or two, till I saw the man on his knees hand out to the other one of Mr. Godfrey's bags of gold.

Then I gave *such* a loud scream that papa awoke on the instant, and the thief almost dropped the bag he had just received. *Almost*, not quite—I wish he had. Instead, he rushed past me with a muttered oath, out into the hall, where fortunately he was met by Robin, who managed to detain him for a few minutes by holding on to his legs like a vice, in spite of the blows he received. By the time he got loose, a *posse* of female servants, with the gardener at their head, made bold to seize and bind him, and then, just when papa most needed it, came to his assistance.

Though he had had the advantage of the other robber to begin with, by falling upon him while he was on his knees, yet, as the man was younger and stronger than he, the slight odds was very soon even. All that the thief wanted, now he saw that everything was discovered, was to escape, but that my father was determined he should not do. It was, however, very difficult to prevent it, and I could render no help, for I could not even get out, as in the struggle they had got between me and the door.

"Let me off and I'll do you no harm," panted the man, who was undermost; "but if you won't, I'll murder you," and wrenching one hand free, he pulled out a long knife.

"Not if I can help it," exclaimed my father, and a frantic struggle to obtain possession of the knife commenced.

"O papa, do let him away!" I cried,

in mortal dread of seeing him dispatched before my eyes. "You'll be killed, and I can't help you!"

But papa had his hands full and couldn't heed me. Over and over they rolled, first one uppermost and then the other, that horrid knife gleaming every now and then in the most unexpected places. I ventured to draw nearer, thinking that next time it was held aloft I might catch hold of it, and determined to do something for my poor father; and presently I had the happiness to succeed, one reason of which was perhaps in my attack being unexpected.

"Thank you, Lizzie," breathed my father. "Ah! you villain! Would you?"

This last ejaculation was caused by a movement of his antagonist, who, rendered desperate by the loss of his weapon, had managed to seize him by the throat, and would soon have finished him, but for the

opportune entrance at that moment of the gardener and his companions, who made as short work of this robber as the other, and speedily had him fastened up beyond the power of mischief.

Poor papa was very much exhausted after his encounter, but beyond that, uninjured, and capable of giving instructions as to the disposal of our prisoners. In the meantime Robin had gone for the police, and by nine o'clock in the morning we were rid of our disagreeable guests, who were safely lodged in the station-house. And so ended our night's adventure, fortunately without damage to the person or property of any of us.

Robin told us afterwards, with some triumph, that his doubts of his mother's intentions had been fully justified. She had merely sent for him to give information to the two burglars regarding the "ins and outs" of our premises; not that

they had known of Mr. Godfrey's wealth being there, but simply meaning to become possessed of some of our property. But on Robin's suspicions as to their intentions being aroused, and his consequent refusal to gratify their curiosity, he had been shut up a close prisoner that he might not give us the alarm. He had, however, though with infinite difficulty, effected his escape, and to him, under God, we owed our happy deliverance. For some time he was quite a hero, poor fellow, as he well deserved to be.

When Effie and Dick came home a week afterwards, we talked of nothing else for days, their questions and interest being inexhaustible. Both, but especially Dick, regretted sincerely that they had missed "such a lark," as he called it, and almost wished for a repetition of the affair, a sentiment which I cannot say I echoed.

Robin was substantially rewarded for

his services in being sent to a good school and receiving a thorough gardener's education. As you know, he has filled that post to us since our old gardener left.

And now you shall hear how I got my wish. One day Dick came running into the schoolroom, where Effie and I were practising a duet.

"O Lizzie," he exclaimed, "papa is coming up the drive in such a jolly little pony-carriage! I bet anything it's for you."

Effie and I rushed from the piano into the dining-room, and there, sure enough, we beheld papa getting out of a dear little pony-carriage, drawn by such a beautiful black pony.

My heart beat with delight and excitement. I could scarcely believe it was for me, but on my expressing my doubts on the subject, my father said,—

"Yes, Lizzie, it is for you—all your own. I promised to grant the wish of the first who

did me a service, and I am sure you have done so. You gave up your own desires to teach Robin, and you and he together have saved me from a very serious loss. So now, darling, there is the pony-carriage for you. I hope it will give you as great pleasure as I wish it may," and dear papa kissed me affectionately, while I could not thank him enough for his beautiful present.

"That is the end of my story, dears," said Aunt Lizzie, turning to her nephew and niece, who had been very attentive listeners. "There is not much about the schoolroom in it, but it is what I was thinking of when you came in, Arthur."

"Thank you very much, Aunt Lizzie," said Bertha and Arthur together. "And Uncle Dick got his wish too?"

"To be sure he did—dear Dick! There, I see him passing the window. Run and meet him."

A YULE HOME-COMING.

WE had just broken up for the Christmas holidays. That morning in school, Billy Wardle had been more than usually aggravating. He had been passing a drawing round the class, representing my father's schooner, the *Betsey*, as a slummocky old wreck, being badly beaten in a race by a smart brig which stood for his father's old boat, the *William Williams*.

Now, everybody in Nevern knows, or rather did know—for the dear old *Betsey* is now no more—that no finer, better found, or faster sailing schooner ever hauled out of the cove. But Billy

Wardle was always jealous; and though his father and my father were the best of friends, Billy and I were sworn enemies. I suppose on the average, Billy and I stripped to each other, on the vexed question as to whose father had the best boat, three times a week. The fortune of war varied. Sometimes Billy endowed me with a pair of black eyes, sometimes I left Billy with his lips two or three sizes too big for him, and his nose awry.

Billy was leaving school for good that day to join his father on board the brig, and as the fellows considered that matters would be quiet in the future, they hoped for a good flare up before we parted.

Now, though I was a good deal annoyed, I didn't feel much in fighting humour. I had promised mother to get home early, so that I could cut a bit of holly to decorate the house against father's home-coming. We expected the *Betsey*

up with the tide, and as father was going to "lay up" for a week, I was looking forward to grand times. Besides, I didn't want to part from Billy like that. He wasn't half a bad fellow, though he had such stupid notions about his father's leaky old tub. So I just said, when we got outside,—

"I'm not going to fight you to-day, Billy, so you chaps needn't wait."

The fellows who had gathered round looked very disappointed, and Billy walked up and hit me a slap on the cheek.

"Take coward's blow," he said.

Well, of course, I couldn't stand that, so I took off my coat, and we set to. Billy had just given me a stinger on the mouth, and I got my left in on his cheek, when the bystanders began to hurry off, and Mr. Jones, our master, walked up and took us by the ears.

He led us into the empty schoolroom, and began to talk seriously to us. He told us about Christmas being a time of peace and goodwill amongst men, and asked us to part friends, as Billy was going away to sea the day after Christmas Day. I said I bore no ill-will, and Billy said just the same. So we shook hands and walked off together, just like we used to before Billy began his nonsense about the *William Williams* being a better boat than the *Betsey*.

"Tell you what, Jack," says Billy; "let's call it even and have done with it."

"Right," I answered; "the *Betsey* and the *William Williams* are the two finest boats that sail out of Nevern."

"That's settled then," said Billy. "Now I want to tell you something. Bob Evans's father has bought the *Nancy*. You know her; she runs between Polworth and Aberavon. He's going to bring her

round to Nevern. I want you to promise that while I'm away at sea, you'll stick up for the honour of the *Betsey* and the *William Williams* against all comers."

"You can depend on me, old chap," I answered him, and Bob went off quite happy.

Well, that was a big thing for one day, you'll allow; but more was to follow. Little did I think when I set off for home, real pleased that Billy and I had made it up, that the night and the morning would have so many awful hours in store for mother and me.

The wind had shifted round to the north'ard, and it had begun to snow. By the time I got home the sky looked very dirty, and the snow, which was more like little lumps of ice than anything else, began hitting me sharp, stinging blows on the face. I pulled my cap down,

turned my collar up, and set off running, for I knew mother would be getting anxious.

Sure enough, mother was looking very white and scared when I got in. I kissed her and tried to be as jolly as I could, but it was a dismal failure, for we both knew what was in the other's mind. I gulped down the tea mother had got for me, and then I put on my thick pea-jacket, and wrapped a muffler round my neck.

"I expect the *Betsey's* in the cove by this time," I said, to reassure her. "I'll just run down and help to make things ship-shape. You get something nice and hot ready by the time father and I come in."

Mother sighed heavily, and gave me a pitiful look as I turned to go.

By the time I got to the quay, it was blowing big guns, and getting black dark. There was no sign of the *Betsey*

in the cove, and no one had seen anything of her. My heart sank, and I could scarcely keep from blubbering. I squatted down on a heap of nets in old Thomas's shed, and put up something very like a prayer.

Presently I felt an arm steal round my neck. It was Billy.

"Cheer up, old chap," he said. "Never say die while there's a shot in the locker. Your dad isn't going to Davy Jones this voyage. It's only three hours' run from Aberavon, where he's loading slates. Tell you what. When he saw dirty weather coming on, he just made up his mind to ride it out nice and snug inside the breakwater, and come along like a bird as soon as the weather picks up. That's the state of the case, depend on it."

Well, there was some cheer in that, though everybody knows that my father isn't easily kept lob-lolling about when

his course lies for Nevern Cove. I took it as real kind of Billy to act so friendly, but I wasn't satisfied.

"Mother will be so anxious," I said.

"I thought of that," chimed in Billy, "so I've asked my mother to go and sit along of her till Captain Davis turns up. Don't you worry about her. She'll be all right."

We sat in the shed and talked of odd things—of our fights, of school, of Billy's seafaring life that was to start so soon, of my uncle John, who was quartermaster on the *Achilles*, of the lifeboat they were soon going to bring to Nevern, and a hundred other matters of the deepest concern to us. Meanwhile, the wind got fiercer and fiercer, and the hut shivered like a beggar in a breeze. At last I could stand it no longer.

"I'm going along the cliff, Billy," I said, "just to take a sight out seaward."

"You must be mad, Jack," said Billy. "Why, a cat couldn't keep his footing on the cliff to-night. You stop where you are, and the good news will come along in no time. Your dad's sure to send a message by the coach, and it'll be in Nevern by now."

"Well, let's go and meet the coach instead," I suggested, for I wanted to be up and doing.

Sitting in that old shed, with the wind screaming outside, gave me the creeps.

We turned out and battled against the wind, holding on to one another till we got off the quay and on to the high-road.

We had scarcely turned on to the Aberavon road when we saw the lights of the coach two or three hundred yards away. We waited, and up it came, old Ben Lloyd, the driver, burying his head in his beard, and the two horses plunging

heavily through the slush. We hailed Ben, and he pulled the horses up.

"Ben," I shouted, and my heart went "thump, thump" against my ribs, "was the *Betsey* in the harbour when you left Aberavon?"

"Who be you as asks?" said Ben slowly.

"Jack Davies," I answered.

"Like as not, like as not, lad," said Ben, whipping up his horses, and leaving us standing in the road.

"Billy," I said, as the coach swung off, and my heart sank into my boots, "the *Betsey's* out, and dad's a lost man."

"Not a bit of it," said Billy. "The *Betsey's* the finest sea boat on the coast, and your dad's the best sailor. He's riding the storm out with plenty of sea room, a lot more comfortable than we land-lubbers."

Now I come to think of it, I consider

it was real noble of Billy to talk like that. Why, we had been fighting that very point out with our naked fists for the last couple of years. But I didn't notice it then. I was too full of dad's danger and mother's trouble.

"I'm going on the cliff now, anyway," I said, trying to stop my teeth from chattering and my voice from breaking. "But don't you come. I shall be all right."

"I'm going to see you through this, Jack, my lad," answered Billy cheerily; and if it hadn't been such a silly, girlish thing to do, I believe I should have hugged him then and there.

Well, we climbed along the cliff top on our hands and knees, straining our eyes away seaward. The spume and the sleet were flying up from the sea, wetting us to the skin, and the wind was roaring like thunder. I couldn't help thinking of the

jagged rocks below, like a fringe of giant teeth ready to crunch any poor boat that should come nigh them, and as I thought, I shivered with fear.

Presently we could tell by the way the path sloped that in front of us, some fifty yards off the cliff, was the Great Spire, a huge upstanding pillar of slate like a church steeple.

"Let's stop here," I said; and as I spoke the foam of a great wave shot up above us, and pelted down on our heads like a shower-bath. Three hundred feet high the cliff was, if it was an inch, so you may guess with what terrible force the waves were breaking below.

Presently the wind lulled a bit, and a storm of hailstones rattled about our ears. In the middle of it I shuddered with terror. I could have sworn that I heard a shriek, a terrible scream of distress from below.

That instant a livid sheet of lightning lit up the sea for a moment, and in the glare I saw the *Betsey*, hard jammed on the Spire. One glimpse, and I knew her. Her mast had gone by the board, her bowsprit was snapped short, and the sea was pounding her poor hull into matchwood before my eyes.

Then I knew the worst, and fell on my face in the bitterest anguish I have ever known, while Billy tried to comfort me. Oh, the terror of it—the father I loved, almost worshipped, swallowed up by the cruel sea, not fifty yards away, and *I*, I could not lift a hand to save him! Heaven help me, I thought nothing of the crew—only of him! only of him!

"Back, back," said Billy. "Let's hurry back for help."

"What help?" I sobbed; and Billy was silent, for he knew as well as I that no help but a miracle of God could save him now.

"Mother! mother!" I groaned, as I thought of her pale face and anxious eyes waiting for the return that might never be.

All the bitter night through Billy and I sat crouching together on the face of that cliff, his arm about me, his kindly voice in my ear.

At last the cold, pale morning dawned, and with the dawn the wind went down and the sea moaned and sulked like an angry child. As the light crept over the sky, Billy left me and crept to the edge of the cliff, leaning over, till every moment I expected to see him fall. I crawled to him with stiffened limbs and aching body, and gripped hold of his legs.

Suddenly he yelled,—

"Jack, Jack, look! look! there's somebody on the ledge."

In a moment I was on my stomach, gazing down with hungry eyes. Half way down the cliff was a shelf of rock five

or six yards long and a couple of yards broad. A man was lying prone on it. With half an eye, I knew it was MY FATHER!

The miracle had happened. The waves had tossed him on to the ledge, and had left him there. I started back with my head in a whirl, and had it not been for Billy, I should assuredly have tumbled over.

"Wait, Jack," said Billy; "I'll be back soon."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before he set off running towards the quay. I covered my face with my hands and sent up an anguished cry to the Saviour of men. The minutes seemed years till Billy returned with half a dozen fishermen carrying a coil of rope.

"I'll go down," I said; "I'm the lightest, and it's my father."

No one said me nay, and with a noose

round my body and a stick in my hand to fend me off the cliff, I next knew that I was dangling between sky and sea.

I stepped on the ledge and crouched down beside my father, while a chilling horror went through me, for I thought him dead. His face was bleeding, his arms lay limp at his sides, and there was no breath on his lips. With difficulty I turned him over and thrust my hand under his soddened jersey to feel his heart. It was still beating.

Then I sent up a wild yell, and an answering cheer assured me that the watchers on the cliff understood its meaning. I slipped the noose round father's body, and shouted again. Slowly the insensible form of my father was hauled up, and I saw a dozen hands stretched out to lift him into safety.

Then earth and sea and sky swam about me, and I thought I should have

fallen on to the rocks below. I saw a dangling noose fall dimly by my side. I dropped my arm into it, and all was over.

* * * *

When I awoke I was at home in front of the fire, and mother was kneeling by me.

"Father?" I asked, in a hollow whisper. Mother turned my head half round, and there I saw dad lying on a mattress smiling faintly at me.

I managed to smile back at him, and a great thankfulness filled my heart as I slipped into a sound dreamless sleep.

WILLIE,
THE LOST CHILD.

DO not the very words, "A lost child," make you think of dark forests, or deep glens, or lonely mountains, where you yourself may some day wander and miss the way? Ah, but the place where this poor little lost one strayed was darker than the darkest forest of earth, deeper than its deepest glen, lonelier than its loneliest mountain; for little Willie was lost in a coal-pit!

Willie was a Welsh boy, and lived in a colliery-village, not far from the mouth of a pit that had been worked in for many

and many a year. His father, being a miner, did not think it wrong to make his little boy lead the same dark life as himself; so when Willie was about ten years old he had to spend ten hours, and sometimes even twelve hours a day in the pit. A very dark life indeed it was, as those who have seen even the mouth of a coal-pit will believe. He was soon made one of the trappers of the pit. In every mine there are several doors, to prevent too much air, or wrong currents of it, geting into the long underground passages. Little boys are placed behind the "ventilating doors," as they are called; and the business of the boys is to pull them open, by means of ropes, when they hear any wagons coming along. These boys are called the trappers of the mine. Poor little fellows, they sit in darkness all day long; for they only get two short candles in their lamps, one of which lasts until

they reach their seats behind the doors, and the other lights them on their way back again at night : so they have, indeed, a dreary, sad time in the pit.

One Friday morning, some years ago, Willie went to work as usual along with his father ; but, on reaching the mouth of the pit, he found that he had forgotten his lamp ; and, while he ran home for it, his father and the other colliers went down to their work.

Thus, when Willie returned and descended he found himself quite alone ; so he hastened as fast as he could to reach his own part of the mine ; but somehow or other—he never knew how—his little lamp went out, and left him in total darkness !

At first he did not feel very much afraid, but groped along, expecting every moment to see a light or hear voices and footsteps ; but, strange to say, the silence

seemed to grow deeper and deeper, and at last he knew that he must have turned aside into one of the old works of the mine! The thought was far from being cheering, though he still hoped every turn he made would bring him to the right road again. On and on he wandered, sometimes trying one passage and sometimes another; but none brought him any nearer his companions. At one place, it is true, he knew they could not be far off, for he heard the noise of their hammers, and even fancied he could distinguish his father's voice. But a thick, impenetrable wall of coal remained between them; and though he shouted loud and long, he knew they could not hear his cries. Night came on at last, and the dull sound of the hammers ceased; so he knew the work was over for that day, and that now, indeed, there was no chance of being found. He was very hungry, too, and

many a child with less presence of mind would have eaten the dinner which he had brought with him; but Willie knew that though he was hungry then, he would be hungrier still in a while: so he only took a small part of his bread, and kept the rest very carefully. This was on Friday night; and, as the pit was always closed both on Saturday and Sunday, Willie thought with terror of the two days of darkness, solitude, and starvation that were before him. At first he hoped that he might be missed and sought for; but no one ever came to seek him. This seems so strange, that I fear poor Willie must have been in the habit of playing truant, and that his father must have supposed he had gone forth on some pleasant ramble among the hills; but whether it was so or not, no one thought of looking for him in the pit. All these two days he wandered up and down,

uttering bitter cries that none could hear. But his wanderings had at last brought him upon the right path, so that on Monday morning, when the men began to descend, he heard their voices and saw their lights, and knew that help had come at last. Poor child! he was taken up in a truly sad plight—nearly dead with cold, fatigue, and hunger; and he had so lost count of time, that he imagined that he had been shut up for eight days, instead of three, in his gloomy prison!

I wish I could tell you that after this he did not need to go down into the terrible pit again, and got some more child-like work to do; but I never heard what became of poor Willie afterwards, and I am afraid that this was not very likely.

And now, my dear child, why have I told you this story? My reasons are three: First, because it is true; second,

because it should make you thankful for your brighter lot; and, third, because I wish you to pause and think of these two little words, the "lost" and "found," and to ask yourself what meaning they can have to you. In these days of Bible-knowledge there are few, even of little children, who have not been taught their lost and ruined state by nature. But, alas! there are many who learn such words as these, "All we like sheep have gone astray," and never think of them as really describing themselves. These are children far away from home, although they know it not.

You would think it dreadful to be lost, like poor Willie, for three days in a dark and dreary pit; but think how dreadful to have spent a lifetime wandering about among what seemed the pleasant, sunny mountains of vanity, and at its close to find that they have led you far away from

heaven, and brought you to the blackness of darkness for ever! Oh, be wise in time, and remember that you yourself need to be saved! Take David's prayer and make it your own—"I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant"—and you will not cry in vain: for you will find that the Good Shepherd was seeking you long before, and is ready to lay you on His shoulders, and to bear you home "rejoicing."

MATTY'S CANARY.

WHEN Matty was five years old, her uncle John gave her a birthday present. What do you think it was? A canary in a green cage! Matty clapped her hands with joy, and did not forget to say, "I thank you, Uncle John, very much indeed."

The cage had a green glass cup of water on one side for the canary to drink, and a green glass cup of seeds on the other side for his food. There was also a white tub inside for birdie to wash in. Matty filled the tub with fresh warm water every morning, and saw him take his bath.

"Peep!" said birdie from his perch. "Peep!" said he, hopping on the rim of his little tub. "Peep!" he said, dipping his bill into the water. If it felt right, in he went, splashing and dashing, flapping his wings, and bobbing up and down to his heart's delight. I wish every little child loved to be washed so.

What diverted Matty most was the way he went to bed. He put his head under his wing, and went to sleep on one foot, and that was all—much easier than *her* way, she thought, which was to be undressed and washed, taking "so long," especially when she was sleepy. But little girls must remember that long is made longer by impatience or fretfulness; and that I do not believe the canary knows anything about. His early morning song often wakes Matty. "Ah, you are praising God 'fore I," Matty says.

She often talks to her little bird, and

asks him many questions; to all of which he says, "Peep, peep!" which is certainly a very prudent answer.

In summer she used to fetch him chickweed and plantain seeds fresh from the garden. "Birdie," she said, "are you not very glad to be waited upon so?" "Peep!" answered birdie. Whether that was yes or no, I cannot tell.

One morning after breakfast Frank opened the cage door, and out flew birdie. After making a few stops, he lighted on the table. He hopped from one plate to another, and from one cup to another, picking up the crumbs, and taking a drink where he pleased, to the great delight of the children.

I thought he was very much pleased to *wait upon himself;* and I wish some little boys and girls whom I know, that are very fond of being *waited upon,* liked it as well.